

*Original Paper*

# The Construction of Hyper-Reality of Advertisement in Consumption Culture

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*In the light of Baudrillard's theory on consumption (symbol, simulation and simulacra, hyper-reality), this thesis discusses a specific point in the process of goods circulation: creating a consumption market by constructing a hyper-reality in advertisement. On the one side, consumption and consumerism are introduced. In contemporary society consumption has already become a lifestyle. Consumerism has been internalized as a kind of social logic. On the other side, modern consumption takes symbols as the presentation of consuming. Symbol value substitutes subject value. Symbol appears; subject disappears. The reality is deconstructed. Hyper-reality is constructed. Finally, hyper-realistic advertisement is the driving force of the consumer society. Advertisement constructs a kind of hyper-realistic consumption cultural, which finally is rationalized as a general collective consciousness.*

**Keywords***consumption culture, advertisement, symbol, hyper-reality***1. Introduction**

The great changes of the daily life in the twentieth century marked the complete changes of the social organization and structure, that is, the way of people's existence changed fundamentally (Lee, 2000). Although modern science and technology play an important role on these changes, it is not the only factor. More fundamentally, the changes of way of life owe to the changes of economic structure of the society and the mode of production ideology, which indicates the arrival of the consumer society and the consumption culture.

When the accumulation of material wealth reaches to a certain extent beyond the daily needs, people have the ability and economic power to consume. Ideologies and social institutions encourage consumption, which helps to bring about the consumer society.

“Studying consumption culture is actually studying the way of modern life” (Lee, 2000). Consumption culture, according to the definition of Peter N. Stearns, is to describe a society, where most people’s life goals partially built on accessing what they obviously do not need. They engaged in the process to get something—to buy things. Their identity, in part, is determined by the things they buy or show. In such society, a number of agencies encourage and serve for the consumption culture (Stearns, 2001). In addition to introduction and conclusion, this paper is divided into four parts: the beginning two parts introduce the theory about the consumer society and its typical operation mode. Consumerism has been internalized as a kind of social logic. The consumption logic is to produce and manipulate social signifying symbols. Symbol value substitutes the subject value. A kind of hyper-reality is constructed.

## 2. The Generalization of Consumption

In *The System of Objects*, Baudrillard defined consumption as follows:

Consumption is not a material practice, nor is it a phenomenology of “affluence”. It is not defined by the nourishment we take in, nor by the clothes we clothe ourselves with, nor by the car we use, nor by the oral and visual matter of the images and messages we receive. It is defined, rather, by the organization of all these things into a signifying fabric: consumption is the virtual totality of all objects and messages ready—constituted as a more or less coherent discourse. If it has any meaning at all, consumption means an activity consisting of the systematic manipulation of signs (Baudrillard, 1996).

Nowadays, the generalization of consumption is the basic fact in the consumer society. Consumption is a lifestyle as well as a way of human’s existence. Consumption and consumerism has evolved as a socio-cultural phenomenon. Consumption in the consumer society is the pivotal step for economy development. Consumption market creates the accumulation of affluent goods as well as a huge consumer group. Abstinence is no longer regarded as a virtue in modern society. In a sense, consumption is an important way to show consumers’ willing, social status and identity. Not only the consumed goods are symbols, but the consumers are symbols as well.

### 2.1 *Consumption: As a Way of Life*

On internationally, the accomplishments of research on consumer phenomenon from the point of human lifestyle are very rich. The research paradigm on consumption complements with Marx’s anthropological paradigm. It is sociological as well as cultural. Weber, Werner Sombart, Simmel after Marx all studied about consumption or consumption-related issues. When it comes to the basic spiritual foundation of capitalist values, Weber believed that the spirit of profession and abstinence established the spiritual foundation for ethical capitalism development. However, if this conclusion is ratiocinated to the extreme, capitalism will be impossible. Only when the commodities exchange and rapid

consumption are completed, the residual value is possible. Therefore, if the capital grows according to its own logic, it is necessary to produce a huge consumer group. The vast accumulation of commodities must be resolved through the huge consumer group. In order to solve this problem, the first step is to establish consumerist values for consumers and further create the huge consumer group. Without these values, the market will encounter its developing bottleneck.

In this regard, the British economist Arthur Lewis wrote in 1955 *The Theory of Economic Growth*, which made a name for him later:

The canons of asceticism recognize that those who consume less have an outstanding virtue. Several conclusions attest that consuming less is a noble way of life. Firstly, some canons stress the value of depressing personal innate desire, such as appetite, libido and other need. They encourage various forms of fasting and asceticism as a means of spiritual salvation. Secondly, some religious rules believe that a person consumes time to make a living. The time could have been spent on self-cultivation or religious worship. Not all religions hold this view—some religions believe that work and prayer both are the praise of God, and that work is a means to seek spiritual virtues. Thirdly, a man sometimes tends to infringe its companions when making a living. In order to avoid this tendency of combat, the best way is to limit personal consumption (Lewis, 1996).

Thus in order to foster huge consuming desire, the asceticism restricting the development of capitalism must be interpreted in a new way: creating wealth by all means to achieve social status is also a virtue, which deserves the praise of God. In addition, it is necessary to create a kind of social mode aiming at promoting consumption. In fact, when choosing between abstinence and enjoyment, the vast majority will choose the latter. People would not give up the opportunity to improve their living standards even though it may humiliate its soul—in most societies, getting power and higher social status are more attractive than asceticism to most people” (Lewis, 1996).

“‘Abstinence’ has been regarded as an integral part in the morality of the ‘pre-modern’ society” (Berry, 2005). However, “luxury” as the cursed word in traditional ethics has been expelled gradually from the areas of moral judgment and now is regarded as a pure economic word. It is a process to moralize luxury. Consumerism is constructed from two sides: on the one side, a general consumerist values in secular life is established; on the other side, economists generally support the consuming behavior.

There are different ways to study consumption culture. British sociology professor Mike Featherstone believed that there are three perspectives: firstly, the expansion of capitalist commodity premises the consumption culture on the large accumulation of consumption goods and the building of shopping places. It results the significant growth of leisure and consumption activities in contemporary western society. The second perspective is more rigorous sociological. People perform the social disparities in satisfying their need with commodities. From these disparities, they obtain the recognition of social status. The extent of people’s satisfaction to commodities depends on their social pathways accessing to commodities. By consuming different goods in different ways, people’s social relationships and the

social distinction are established. The third perspective is concerned about the emotional happiness and dreams and consuming desires. A consumption image or a special consuming site directly stimulates consumers' aesthetic pleasure, emotional happiness and dreams, or desires. This phenomenon is very popular (Featherstone, 2002).

"Consumption" is defined as a systematic symbol manipulation or a concept practice. It is far beyond the association between people and goods as well as the interaction between individuals. It can be extended to all areas such as social, historical, cultural area in human society. To Baudrillard, in order to become objects of consumption, "material" must become "symbol", because "object" is never consumed just because of its materiality, but because of its difference from other "objects" (Baudrillard, 1996). Similarly, when the "objects" are transformed into a systematic "symbol" and "consumption" become the systematic symbolic manipulation behavior, the relationship between people also change into a "consumption" relationship, that is, the relationship existing in objects and consumed by objects. The dominance of symbols also shows that, from a technical structure to a technical concept, an ethical concept or individual psychology, the object system is fully constructed, covering and absorbing the social life with their own form.

## *2.2 Consumerism: As an Internal Social Logic*

With the theory of symbols-simulacra, Baudrillard pointed out that, owing to the extreme development of productivity and extremely affluent of objects, people is surrounded by objects (symbols) totally in the consumer society. People consuming is only a surface phenomenon. In the deeper sense, consuming enslaves people through objects and symbols. In this age, the power of consumption stretches to all social relations and penetrates into every cell of the society. What are consumed are not the mere objects but the relationship structure between object and people, because by consuming goods people's relationship is established. Consumption, like a bouquet of bright light of Charism, watches and shines its people.

For Baudrillard's part, consumption constructs the internal logic of the present modern society mainly from the following three aspects:

Firstly, everything in social life has become the goods to be consumed in a sense. People do not only consume goods, but also people's body, psychology and ideas, and "even the natural libido called by Frued is hard to escape from being consumed" (Yang, 2004). Or it can be said, the existence value of objects depends on if it can become the commodities to be consumed or not. In this sense, all objects can only exist in the relations structure of consumption.

Secondly, the prevalence of consumption goods establishes the legitimacy basis for the contemporary society. The consumer society firstly demonstrates capitalist myth of equality. Equality is the basis of bourgeois ideology. It is contained in the ideology of the British Industrial Revolution, the French Bourgeois Revolution and the War of Independence of the United States. However, in the process of industrialization, equality was not really reflected, especially in daily life, the inequality of material conditions is obvious to all. The welfare revolution seems realizing the promise of equality: every one

is equaled to enjoy goods. They are equal to have the demand and meeting desire. To Baudrillard, Welfare Revolution is the revolution of bourgeois, or simply a successor or performer who claims that everyone is equal in principle but fundamentally fail to achieve this revolution testament. Baudrillard believed that all political games in the welfare state and the consumer society is to achieve automatic equality and final equilibrium level by increasing the total amount of wealth to eliminate the inherent contradictions between people. In the consumer society, people accept the abundance of objects as a natural fact and then they also accept the legitimacy of this society naturally. The poverty and inequality is just the problem existing in the development, which can be eliminated by welfare policy. This deprivation and inequality is the basis for people to accept the abundance naturally, which indicates a legitimacy conspired by consumption and social system in entire system and ideology.

Thirdly, all “individuality” is realized by consuming. Contemporary society encourages the pursuit of individuality. One way to realize individuality is to consume the distinctive goods. To match with the requirements, modern “individuality” has an isomorphic relationship with the obtaining of goods, which finally make the goods appear as a series (Note 1). But more than that, in Baudrillard’s view, a profound expression of modern fetishism is that people no longer orient their consuming on objects but on themselves. For example, they isolate their bodies or a part of body to have body care, which is consuming goods on the surface but actually consuming themselves on the deep sense. On the surface, they keep their “individuality” by consuming, but in the deep sense consuming becomes a universal standard, not consuming means not being in the consumer society. Only by keeping the body itself as an object of consumption, can people get a real sense of presence and a sense of tranquility.

When people obtain their sense of presence and tranquility in consuming, consumption itself is accepted actively. In *The System of Objects*, Baudrillard said,

Consumption is not the passive attraction and possession opposite to active production. It seems that the pros and cons only can be weighted by a naive behavior. It is necessary to put forward at the outset that consumption is an active mode of the establishment of relations (this is not only the relationship between people and goods, but also the relationship between people and community as well as people and the world). It is a systemic activity mode. This mode established the consumption culture system (Baudrillard, 1996).

Therefore, only in the “active” consuming of daily life can people be continued—the continuation of themselves. Thus, the social mobilization is not completed on the point of production technique but on the sense of consuming, with a conscious “force” to achieve its goals. This conscious “force” is also a process to internalize desire.

Baudrillard believed that a consumption consciousness has penetrated into the overall structure of the social life. “So that the consumption is defined as a completely idealistic systematic behavior, it is far beyond the relationship of people and objects and personal relationship and further extends to the area of history, communication and culture” (Baudrillard, 1996). The consumption logic is “not the logic of gaining the use value of finance and services—not the logic of meeting needs, but the logic to produce

and manipulate social signifying symbols” (Baudrillard, 1996). With Baudrillard’s illustration, consumption has been a way of life. Those who consume less are regarded as not making full use of the social resources. Consumerism, accompanying with the establishment of consumption logic, has internalized as a social logic. Under the training of this logic, women ardently join the army of consuming. They are considered as related with consuming inborn. The manipulation of symbol no doubt plays a significant role during the process of internalization of consumerism. In the following chapter, the manipulation of symbols is illustrated especially. Symbol value substitutes the subject value, which transfers the reality to hyper-reality.

### **3. Symbol: The Representation for the Way of Consuming**

Baudrillard’s analysis is beyond the area of subject and into the field of symbolic consumption. The temporary function and role of objects instead of its traditional function is discussed in this chapter. In this case, the object is no longer an object with a specific function, but freed from its function and changing into an “individual” symbol. Due to the development of science and technology, especially the development of electronic media technology, modern society has entered into a symbol Kingdom, where people are surrounded by infinite symbols and manipulated by symbols. A wide range of advertisements, promotion and television information affect every area of people’s life. Modern society has entered an age of surplus information, different from the surplus objects in the former age. Surrounded by a large number of symbols, the public gradually lost their sense of observation and judgment, confused by this dazzling information and bewitched by these symbols. What’s more, newspapers, television media and network are training people with symbols from material needs to spiritual needs.

#### *3.1 The Symbol Value beyond Subject Value*

Commodities become symbols. Consuming activities become a process of creating symbols. As a symbol, commodity is no longer the general signified but a collection of signifiers (Note 2). In other words, it undertakes what it does not have on its own or the very few things it has. The use value of a commodity is relatively certain and limited. From the perspective of the entity, it is not able to be superimposed with other use value in any case, but once a commodity is transformed into a symbol carrier, the result will be completely different. In order to present this, it is necessary to construct two settings:

(1) Objects series. Different commodities are mixed located together in the same scene to stir up consumers’ psychological connection of different needs to the commodities.

There is quite different meaning to the drugstore: it does not juxtapose categories of merchandise, but lumps signs together indiscriminately, lumps together all categories of commodities, which are regarded as partial fields of a sign-consuming totality. In the drugstore, the cultural centre becomes part of the shopping centre. It would be simplistic to say that culture is “prostituted” there. It is culturalized. Simultaneously, commodities (clothing, groceries,

catering, etc.) are also culturalized in their turn, since they are transformed into the substance of play and distinction, into luxury accessories, into one element among others in the general package of consumables (Baudrillard, 1998).

People do not equal culture to objects (products), but the material (commodity) to a cultural existence. Only does commodity become a symbol to express a specific meaning as well as multiple meanings, people can juxtapose different goods or different meanings into a commodity. Object is possible to be meaningful, but its meaning only can be realized by people's signifying.

(2) Propaganda series. Only when a commodity is consumed, its use value emerges. However, purchasing after knowing all use value of a commodity will result the huge accumulation of goods. Furthermore, purchasers do not have that much time and expertise to know about every new product. The cost of time and the need of expertise may discourage the buyers. Therefore, manufacturers or merchants need pre-present the true efficacy of merchandise and additional meaning to the purchasers. The consumer society does not only produce huge commodities, but also create the environment, and further stimulate the needs of purchasing. When objects series and promotional series are juxtaposed, an artificial purchasing environment is produced. Under such situation, the series of objects, images and pleasure experience are stacked together, the mall is no longer the objects world, and it is a cultural venue full of symbols, temptation, desire and impulse. In traditional society, the carnival is prohibited. Even some performance is severely restricted, which is only allowed to be held in specific festival and specific locations. Carnival, trade fairs, and festive celebration are symbolic subversion and transgression to the official "civilization" culture. They constitute the individual psychological space. In the consumer society, the desire carnival is promoted in any time and any place, which is no longer a taboo and fantasy, as well as no longer the privilege for the nobles. The so-called psychological space is placed in an environment where the normal life is subverted. Under this environment, taboos and fantasies can be realized and the impossible dream can come true (Featherstone, 2002). The modern consumption transfers the virtual things into the reality and the reality into a virtual stuff. This prominently presents on its social function. It is a way to obtain the social status and to present the social identity.

When people consumes, there is an interactive relationship between human desire and objects. Advertisement is the bridge of the relationship. Baudrillard pointed out the importance for goods becoming advertising symbols: items/advertising system constitute a symbolic meaning system. It can not structure individuality, but specify and classify it. It can not structure social relations, but categorize it. It is formalized by itself and become the universal system of social identity—a symbol for the "status" (Baudrillard, 1996). To Baudrillard, consumption to symbols is not simply consuming food and clothing. It is a "self-realization" for the consumer and a way to show "self-worth" with the purpose of "showing off". Consumption is not just consuming material or commodity but for "individuality" and "distinction". In consuming, the symbol itself is valuable. The symbolic value constitutes the core of the consumption culture.

Firstly, for Baudrillard's part, the symbol consumption impacts the original ethics and customs in traditional society and form a new consumption culture. The traditional consumption is mainly in respect of the use value and function value of objects. The generation of symbol consumption played a huge impact on Weber's theory of Protestant Ethic which advocates thrift and hard work. Thousands of years, consumption was placed after production and accumulation. People relied on their own hard work and consumed after their saving reaches a certain level, but the situation is completely different in today's society. Although people have not earned enough money, they can get the goods by consumer loans. "The consumption exists prior to the production" (Baudrillard, 1996). The original moral order is thus turned upside down. With the traditional value respects, the ideology of working first and enjoying later is regarded as outdated. The improvement of productivity led to the absolute excess of goods, which further caused the implementation of consumer loans and credit system. The whole society is encouraging consuming from both mechanism and concept point, therefore, the morality of consumer society is: consuming first and then accumulating. Savings is regarded as ridiculous.

Secondly, the symbolic value becomes the core of the consumption culture. The symbolic value means that things or commodities are valued by the social status and authority they represent, rather than the cost of the property or the value of labor. It is necessary to compare the symbol value and use value to understand symbols. According to the traditional concept, the value of the object is determined by the amount of labor consumed. Once an object is transferred as a symbol, its value, however, can not be measured simply from the use value and labor value. In Baudrillard's view, the symbolic value and use value can be opposite. That is, from the point of the use value and exchange value, the value of labor may be a little bit, but once it is consumed as a symbol, its value may far exceed its use value and labor value. Symbolic value is not subject to the constraints of the use value and labor value. For example, a branded tie consumes little raw materials and labor but it can be very expensive for its brand. Similarly, the high-tech product is featured as low labor and high symbolic value.

From Baudrillard's explanation, symbol consumption has been a part of daily life. The vitality of symbol and its attraction are not from the symbol itself but the operation of symbol. Baudrillard said, "Once the symbol is liberated from its operation, people can be free only when they are the users of these symbols" (Baudrillard, 1996). In a society full of symbols, people's freedom for decision-making, taste and choice totally depends on the operation of these symbols, and further depends on the corresponding power system. The symbol value beyond subject value is more attractive to people.

### 3.2 The Construction of Hyper-Reality

In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth.

—Michel Foucault (1977) *Discipline and Punish*

The problem about "reality" is the basic issue of western humanities under the concerned field. "Reality" plays a pivotal role in people's life. It is the starting point for perception and cognition. It is the basis for the relation between human and nature, people and society, person and person. It is the first step for the construction of all theories. Throughout the ages, people never stop thinking about and



debating on the issue of reality, which has become a metaphysical complex. With the philosophical reflection on modern technology and metaphysics, Baudrillard introduced the concept of “hyper-reality” and regarded it as a “perfect crime”.

In the foreword of *The Perfect Crime*, Baudrillard stated at the outset: “This book was written about a crime—murdering to reality. This book is to eliminate an illusion—a fundamental illusion of the world. Reality would not disappear in illusion but illusion will disappear in all reality” (Baudrillard, 2000). According to Baudrillard, the visual replace reality. Symbol and reality drift apart. The simulation replaces reality and become a hyper-reality. In this situation, the relationship between people and reality is questionable. Owing to the technology perfect to such an extent, the original real world is masked. To Baudrillard, the technique especially the digital technology makes reality disappear. This perfect crime is operated by the data realization and all pure information events—in short, by cloning the reality and replicating reality to eliminate the real and further to disintegrate the world (Baudrillard, 2000).

Baudrillard introduced two core concepts—simulation and simulacra to present this crime.

Simulacra are to imitate or simulate the reality. In Baudrillard’s view, they are much more real than the reality. Simulacra are the basic path to construct hyper-reality. It is the product when an object is transformed into a symbol. If the past reality is a natural reality, then the present reality is a supernatural reality. In order to know about stimulation, Baudrillard introduced the concept of “simulacra”. Simulacra mean non-real scene. To Baudrillard, the so-called “simulacra” are not fake, but more real than the real scene, because simulacra copy reality and even fictional facsimile. Reality itself cannot be the transcription. With the help of modern digital technology, these simulacra can be copied unlimitedly. Owing to the development of science and technology, artificial products flood the world. This is a technique world full of simulation and simulacra. A lot of simulation and simulacra cover up the original “reality”. The most typical example of simulacra is the “virtual world” in electronic media, such as television and network. The development of modern digital technology facilitates the proliferation of information symbols. The number of symbols infinitely increases. People live under the domination of the large number of symbols. Although people can obtain information quickly and accurately from the large number of symbols, they at the same time are suffering from the visual impact of amount of useless symbols. The electronic media is a game of symbols, a signified without signifiers. Therefore, the new technology, especially the development of the electronic media technology, enables people isolated from the world around them. The real world retreats and disappears. The emergence of the virtual world is accompanied by the retreat of real world. To Baudrillard, this is a world with more information but fewer meanings. Information swallows its own content. It blocks exchanges and masks society. Information disintegrates meaning and society as an illegible state, like a mist (Baudrillard, 1983).

The reality is murdered. This crime relates closely with infinite increasing of symbols. “Simulation” and “simulacra” make the world “distorted” and “hyper-real”, the original “reality” world becomes an

“unreal” one. This phenomenon is not a result of nature development. It results from external factors and the huge social function of the development of science and technology.

The electronic media and the “virtual” world online has challenged the “real” world. In the field of philosophy, the traditional metaphysical “truth” and the “reality” evolving from the modern philosophy are encountered challenge from the perfect “hyper-real” world, that is, the “virtual” world’s challenge. With Baudrillard’s words, the perfectness of the modern technology has been to such an extent that people could no longer see clearly what the “reality” really is. And the views and opinions to the world based on experience become the “fundamental illusion” to the world.

Lefebvre in his *Daily Life in Modern Society* transferred sociological attention to daily life, trying to reconstruct the relationship between person and object and further make objects the positive response to people’s actual needs. Barthes in his *Mythology* claimed that people’s relationship with the object is not connected directly but through the intermediary of symbols. Object is used not because of its using function but the function of exchange. On this point, the true value of the object is rhetorical. Baudrillard thought that once an object enters into the symbol field, it is no longer meaningful, because its meaning exists in the relationship with other items. The system of items exists prior to any single item. Objects can only be truly free when it remains unconscious and natural. While once it has been processed by psychology and symbol, it can only become a “simulation”.

“Simulation” is the aesthetic illusion, the sixth sense, the read chain of encoding and decoding, a parody and a travel. In a short, “simulation” is the mixture of real and imagination. It no longer has the real significance in traditional concept, no longer a realistic experience, no longer impulse returning to the primordially. If the reality means a principle of reciprocity or a scientific principle, then simulation breaks this principle by the following ways: firstly, details deconstructs reality and make it decay into plane, line and series; secondly, through the repetition of details, uncertainty shatters the real reflection completely; thirdly, in the closed loop the prototype of murder become the only temptation with the indefinitely decomposition of series; fourth, looking for metaphysical symbols as a model to take the place of the real in the repetition of code. Baudrillard pointed out four key links during the operation of stimulation: details, duplication, series, models, which subverts the reality from different sides. The details formalize everything. The emergence of abundant details forms molecular codes, which reconstruct repetition and series in collage and cycle. On this basis, the model has become a fulcrum of simulation theory. It purges the real concept of metaphysic and fills the gap of the absence of reality.

Baudrillard divided the process of simulation establishment into four stages: firstly, image represents reality; secondly, image masks and distorts reality; thirdly, image conceals the absence of reality; and fourthly, image severs relation with reality and makes it become the pure simulation. Once in the second phase, image starts masking and distorting the reality, the equal relation between image and reality completely lose. With Baudrillard’s words, images enter into the “evil” order and become some kind of parody. Of course, the significance of image comes from its untrue relationship with the object. To the third stage, the image, like witchcraft, looks like a real existence. The mission for image is to

maintain something behind it. “From the substantial symbols to abstract symbols, this transition marks a decisive turning point. The former implies a reality and a hidden theology (ideological concepts belong to this kind of symbol), the latter began an era of simulation, where God no longer to help you to know about yourself and there is no longer the final judgment to distinguish reality from illusion. The reality revives from artificial matters, all reality died and dissipated in advance” (Baudrillard, 1983). This is a hyper-reality—a reality existing for person, a reality pointing to the ultimate “reality”. Baudrillard claimed that imagination is a way to further digest reality. He had this psychological concept “imagination” a sociological sense—if the image bears the weight of reality directly, it is the imagination that provides the path to reality. No matter it is image or imagination, Baudrillard put them into the simulation epistemology, which manufactures more vividly the details, repetitions, series and model, shatters reality more uncontrollably in the accumulation of goods and its infinite circulation, and finally completely converts the real feeling to the hyper-realistic illusion.

Baudrillard believed that in the inner spirit of the development of Western culture since the Renaissance, the logic about reality seeks asylum and existence proof from God and seeks self-existence from nature and ration. By emphasizing the root, certainty and continuity, it builds up their own values. However, when the production civilization in modern Western culture is substituted by the reproduction civilization and reality is deconstructed in the repetition of illusion, there is no way to find the source of reason and faith. People have to experience the amazing and excitement in a hyper-realistic game. It's very clear in Baudrillard theory, that is, after the digestion of reality, simulacra appear in the space of reality. The simulacra are the products of imagination. They have penetrated into the daily life, structuring and collaging the world. Baudrillard claimed: the simulation logic has not any relation with the fact logic and ration order. The feature of simulation is that simulacra pre-exist and they are hardly based on fact. It's the simulacra that constitute the reality field. The reality itself has no field. All simulacra produce a fact together. This pre-existence, this mixture of facts and simulacra make all images or simulation right and rational on the point that reality can be exchangeable (Baudrillard, 1983, p. 2, F. Paul, trans.). Since the first simulacra fundamentally eliminated the so-called meaning chain, signifier is virtualized due to the lack of a fixed point and further to deconstruct the facts. The simulation logic thus becomes a completely open free space. People can appreciate the hyper-real pleasure in simulacra. People thus needn't distress about truth or false, and they do not need meditate for the meaning of life.

In fact, we should reverse hyper-reality: today's reality itself is hyper-reality. The power of hyper-realism is that it can change the most insipid reality to something beyond reality, but only in some special situation like arts or imagination. Today, the daily political, social, historical, and economic reality from now on integrate with the hyper-realistic simulation. Our lives everywhere have been disseminated in “aesthetic” illusion of reality (Baudrillard, 1983).

It is in this “aesthetic” illusion of reality that the hyper-reality is beyond the affect of simulacra psychology. It's much more real than reality itself. More fundamentally, hyper-reality has become a

collective consciousness. Hyper-reality even penetrated into every detail of people's daily life, hair, teeth, nails, houses, cars, environment, and all of these have access to the existence of a hyper-reality. It is in this hyper-reality that the femininity in the consumer society has been constructed and accepted as a collective consciousness. The following chapter analyzes how advertisement create one and another simulacrum about female images and further construct the simulation of female, that is the hyper-reality of femininity.

#### **4. Hyper-Realistic Advertisement: The Driving Force of the Consumer Society**

As discussed in last chapter, "hyper-reality" penetrates every detail of daily life and exists as a collective consciousness. On constructing the hyper-reality in the consumer society, advertisement plays a very important role. They train and educate the public as consumers. Advertising is a driving power of the consumer society. It decides market and the way of commodities generation, helps to change people's attitude to culture and leads people to consume various concepts to make market profits. For a long time, advertisement has been hidden behind the thrill of mass consumption and hides its true identity as the manipulator of mass psychology. Advertisement identity as the carrier of the culture has been ignored by people when they are thrilled by the sense of fulfillment from consumption. Through gorgeous scene, advertisement stimulates people's senses and their desire. A prestigious advertisement writer who works for a large store in Philadelphia summed up the significance of national advertising: "the role of advertising in sales area is the same as the role of railway in transport industry" (Powers, 1903). Due to the hyper-realistic sense of time and space, advertisement helps to construct a typical femininity in consuming culture. Advertisement builds up a myth for female beauty. In the global market, the "beauty" designed by mass consumption may just be a "trap", so that "the female body will be a new market with numerous branches to be invested and developed" (Ribowiz, 2000). In this chapter, the operation mechanism of advertising and its leading effect on femininity is detailed.

Baudrillard said in *The Consumer Society*: "The advertising is first a statement for object and then is the consumed object itself" (Baudrillard, 1998). Advertisements propagandize the goods and are the consuming goods at the same time. In other words, propaganda conveys merchandise intelligence and becomes a kind of reference. The consuming goods get the audience's sympathy and become the things like consumed culture. Baudrillard pointed out: If products are consumed as products, then their meanings are consumed through advertisement. Advertisement facilitates the mass society. With random and systematic symbols, they obtain people's approval, stimulate people's awareness and reconstruct a community. The mass society and consumer society gain its legitimacy (Baudrillard, 1998).

For Baudrillard, in traditional advertisement, "products" give people a sense of "reality", but now the advertisement based on the form of "images", give people a hyper-real sense. Consumption logic lies that the signifier of an advertisement instead of a product becomes the object for consuming. These

objects are coded as symbols, presenting their power and charming. For Baudrillard, objects are equal to be used but there is no any sense of equality for symbols. The whole consumer society is constructed by mimical symbol culture and its reproduction, while mass media facilitate the formation of this culture.

Selecting a brand (advertisement) rather than another is not about its technical content or quality, nor it can give people a guarantee or applicability, but that advertisement provides a “caring” and “the presence of emotion” (Note 3). It is a totally different experience to accept the recommendation of the advertisement and make a choice by themselves: each consuming from the emergence of needs to meeting needs stays in a background of an emotional field where many advertisements overlap and juxtapose. The commodity in advertisements and the one consumed in daily life are probably not the same thing. Something in advertisements is so poetic to buy back home, but actually it is nothing romantic. The commodities in advertisements and stores display a magic power, which can fill the desire, coveting and exciting. From informing to convincing, from products promotion to brand building, this is a progressive process from “real” to “virtual” and a transition of “hyper-reality” from the “reality”. Advertising provides a kind of communication which does not exist in daily life. With Baudrillard’s terms, the communicated is the simulation for communication. It is more real than the reality. When the abstract consumer transforms into a specific user and the abstract subject in television transmission transforms into a specific subject in daily life, this hyper-reality vanishes. Advertisement is the concentrated expression of consumers’ desire. In their virtual context, advertisement successfully encodes desire. It does not deceive us—it is beyond the truth and the false, just as the objects are beyond usefulness and uselessness with the term of its symbolic function.

Baudrillard stressed, if people do not understand the language effects of advertising, critical theory can not master the new structure dimensions caused by the information mode. Therefore, the cultural essence of the advertisement is to maintain the importance of goods as social signifier (hyper-reality) rather than emphasizing the importance of them as material objects (reality). According to Baudrillard’s logic, the nature of the advertising symbol is not an indicator of objects but indicating significance, a random association of signifiers. In other words, advertisement subverts the traditional association of signifier and signified, pointing to broader structure significance. Advertisements present a chain of meaning: for example, BMW=wealth=status=diamond bachelor=sexy young fashion girl. With the symbolized advertisements, the commodity has been given a value of semiotics, which is totally different from the value of use and exchange. Baudrillard defined consumption as: It is not to use or possess the using value of objects, neither authoritative function for individuals or groups. It is a kind of symbols with the ability of regeneration by sending and receiving information (Baudrillard, 1998). Baudrillard believed that the consumption is not so much based on the use value but the symbol “difference” outside of the entity. As a result, the consumption is no longer just economic behavior, but transformed into cultural behavior with symbolic differentiation as a medium. Therefore, the social effects of the advertisement are not economic but linguistic: the audiences participate in the

dissemination activities as a part of the new consumption systems.

“In advertisement, we are not alienated by their theme, words, or images, neither we do not believe ‘the myth’; we are captured by their care. They speak to us; give us something to see and take care of us” (Baudrillard, 1996). During this care, the vulnerability of the soul is eliminated. Desire is internalized into the advertisement. Advertisement gives people a sense of security. They constitute a self-referential world, a world of symbols. On the one hand, the language of advertisement performs the desire of the public; on the other hand, it boasts to each person that only by acting in the way that advertisement advocates can they be said as having their own individuality. Therefore, people are identified as themselves as well as belonging to the community. This identity is realized in consciousness. The modern advertisements tell people: “Please buy this BMW, because it is the symbol for your noble status”. Or “Please buy this BMW, because there are 65 million people from 250 countries using it”. But these two advertisements mean exactly the same, that is, making consumers feel their individuality at imitating others.

“Objects”, as “symbols”, perform consumers’ individuality, characteristics and status, which constitute the social principles of classification. American scholar Veblen’s concept “conspicuous consumption” (Note 4) explain this point clearly: American tycoon and upstart in the late 19th century violated the principle of human “natural demand”, by spending money to show their wealthy, imitating aristocratic taste, and establishing a social authority based on a huge amount of property. Nowadays, this behavior, with the material and advertisement symbol spreading, has developed into a consumption pattern for the whole society. Consumers can not refuse consumption, because it is personal responsibility, social ethics, and the basic way for the social connection. The concept of “economic man” (Note 5) in economics assumes that the individual is free in market economy, and the sociology uses the concept of “social” to show the decisive significance to individuals. Consumption objects can not be understood from any specific need but be explained from the changing symbol system, which has a magic power to inspire endless desire. Baudrillard pointed out that consumption as a completely idealistic practice. It is impossible completely satisfied. It is doomed to keep the “desire” going. The more people consume, the more they want to consume.

The emergence of the impulse to consume results from the lack of a fundamental sense. The consumption became a reason for man’s existence. Symbols must breed endlessly in order to fill the gap of reality absence. In short, in Baudrillard’s view, the consumer society, because of the break relationship between signifier and the signified and the symbolization of the system of objects, one can only consume one and another symbol for desire, limitlessly and endlessly. Because of the symbolic significance that consumption objects have, the needs for use value change into the needs for desire. Therefore, the fact that consumption meeting needs in the past is transformed into meeting the desire, that is, consuming desire.

## 5. Conclusion

Consumption is internalized as a social logic. It makes everything in daily life a consumable product. Economic benefit becomes the social focus. Every activity in consumer society is reasonable because of the generalization of consumption goods. The abundant symbols improve reality to hyper-reality. Newspapers, magazines, television, website train and educate people with symbols. Modern consumption changes the fictitious to the real and the real to the fictitious. Objects are no longer the objects with specific function. They are free from function and become a symbol of desire to meet individual needs. In the surrounding of abundant symbols, people do not depreciate culture as objects but improve objects as a culture form. In this society, people's freedom for decision making, taste and choices totally relies on the operation of symbols as well as its corresponding power system. By this way, people obtain the feeling of tranquility and being, as well as a social identity and a way to present their identity. Consumerism has been accepted actively by the public.

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## Notes

Note 1. For Baudrillard, the present "object" has been free from the traditional use value regulation and became an isomorphic symbol with "individuality". Symbols appear with great quantity and finally form a series, which trap "individuality" or individual itself.

Note 2. For example, a car was just a vehicle when it was invented. But now, different car brands are more related with different social class, status, and personal wealth.

Note 3. For example, Santa Claus provides a childhood memories for the children and parents.

Note 4. It means the spending of money for and the acquiring of luxury goods and services to publicly display economic power—either the buyer's income or the buyer's accumulated wealth. Thorstein Veblen was an American economist and sociologist, he introduced this concept in his masterpiece *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899).

Note 5. It means humans as rational and narrowly self-interested actors have the ability to make judgments toward their subjectively defined ends. This term was used for the first time in the late nineteenth century by critics of John Stuart Mill's work on political economy.